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# From Studies of Protest Music to Protest Music Studies: Mapping a Field That Doesn't (Yet) Exist

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**ABSTRACT:** This article reviews recent literature on music, protest, and social movements. Its principal focus is on English-language research being conducted in North America and the United Kingdom, dispersed across such disciplines as music studies, social movement studies, anthropology, political science, sociology, and area studies, among others. Four recent trends are highlighted: work that stresses the importance of affect to music's political efficacy; studies addressing the soundscapes of protest events, including the tactical use of noise and silence by activists; research on media ecosystems, with a particular emphasis on online and social media's impact on protest movements; and work that throws into relief the contradictory and ambivalent effects of protest musicking. By drawing attention to these areas of common concern, the article aims to foster dialogue among scholars working in different disciplinary spaces, as a way of mapping the terrain where a future protest music studies might take root and flourish.

**KEYWORDS:** alternative media, music and affect, noise, protest music, silence, social movements, sound studies

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Research on music and protest is remarkably interdisciplinary. Important contributions have been made across a range of fields, including social movement studies, political science, communications, sociology, history, area studies, rhetoric, philosophy, and anthropology, as well as the various disciplines and fields that take music as their object of study (ethnomusicology, historical musicology, music theory, popular music studies, music psychology, etc.). Within academia, it has become a consensus position in recent decades that interdisciplinarity is perforce a good thing. Judged by that yardstick, protest music scholarship is remarkably vibrant. Interdisciplinarity can have its drawbacks, however. This is arguably the case with studies of music and protest: research on the subject is so widely dispersed that it has often impeded exchange between scholars working in different fields of study. Apart from a few landmark texts, which serve as points of reference for scholars working in this loosely defined area (Denisoff 1972; Mattern 1998; Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Manabe 2015), there is not a coherent discourse on the topic. To borrow a concept from Jean-Paul Sartre ([1960] 2003), one might say that most publications on music and protest stand in a relation of "inert seriality" with respect to one another, consisting of atomized interventions that are only connected by a rough similarity of theme or focus. It is perhaps an exaggeration—though not much of one—to say that such a thing as "protest music studies" does not (yet) exist.

What might explain this fragmented landscape? An obvious culprit is professional specialization. But more important, I would suggest, is a fissure that finds expression in the two signifiers that make up the compound term "protest music." In everyday as well as academic discourse, music and politics are commonly treated as discrete and often antagonistic domains, and protest music uncomfortably straddles this divide. This is a problem for scholars of protest music. It is also a problem for musicians, who are often obliged to serve what are felt to be distinct masters—which in turn means that the protest music they produce is routinely judged according to two potentially irreconcilable standards. Either the music succeeds as protest, in which case it is apt to fail as music,

or else it succeeds as music, in which case it is apt to fail as protest. Writing about clandestine recordings that left-affiliated musicians circulated on cassette in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship, for instance, musicologist Laura Jordán González gives voice to this common critique of protest song, noting how in much of the music, its “functional quality” is emphasized “to the detriment of aesthetic concerns” (2011, 313). Even if the odd song or performance manages to square this circle—or even if one maintains that the problem does not reside in protest music as such, but in a certain, culturally specific and ideologically freighted way of partitioning the social world—the habitual division of the musical from the political has consequences not only for how protest music is produced and received but also for how it is studied. One of these consequences is disciplinary and can be seen in the way research on protest music is distributed across academic fields, with one foot in the arts and humanities and another in the social sciences.

A common response to this problem is to maintain that the dichotomy drawn between music and politics is a false one. This is the position notably adopted by the philosopher Jacques Rancière, who has argued that politics fundamentally concerns the “distribution of the sensible,” revolving around “what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (2004, 13). Aesthetics is inevitably bound to politics, according to Rancière, inasmuch as it structures not only what is visible (and invisible) or legible (and illegible) but also what is audible (and inaudible). From this perspective, the commonplace belief that sets music and protest in opposition is itself a political act, representing a particular way of carving up the social world. Yet even if Rancière’s work provides an accurate diagnosis of the fact that the music/politics divide that haunts discourse on protest music is socio-historically contingent, rather than given, it does not so much resolve this problematic as invert it: instead of presuming an *a priori* split between the aesthetic and the political, it asserts their *a priori* identity. Yet neither the union nor the separation of the aesthetic and the political can be guaranteed in advance. Rather, if the aesthetic (and the musical) is political, this is because it has been *politicized*. In short, whether music and the aesthetic more broadly are either articulated or disarticulated from politics is itself a matter of contention and social struggle.

Another way to approach this issue is to observe that while the separation of the aesthetic from the political may be a contingent social construct, this by itself does not diminish its facticity: the sheer pervasiveness of the idea is such that it cannot simply be dispelled by philosophical fiat. Yet an argument I would like to advance here is that the friction between music and protest that a certain hegemonic “distribution of the sensible” has imposed is not just a problem but also a possibility: it generates, as it were, a centrifugal force that courses through the discourses and practices of protest musicking. Among other things, this generative friction serves to counter the centripetal narrowing to which history and past usage of the term “protest music” has lent itself. As the ethnomusicologist Benjamin Tausig (2018) has pointed out, this expression only entered into the English lexicon in the 1940s and only enjoyed widespread usage beginning in the 1960s. Given this history and the specificity of the sociohistorical circumstances under which this signifier was popularized, it is no surprise that “protest music” has often come to function as “a genre description” (37), one that denotes music that places lyrics front and center and that hews closely to the norms of US-based popular and folk musics. But even if the biases built into this reified concept of protest music are not to be discounted—a point I will come back to—they are continually being undone by the unsettled relation between “protest” and “music.” The slippage this engenders within the concept and, above all, within the practices of protest musicking has a number of effects. Within research on this subject, it has encouraged scholars to expand the term’s application, both synchronically and diachronically, resulting in the latter instance in what Tausig (2018, 36) calls the “*ex post facto*” labeling of practices and repertoires as protest music (e.g., broadside ballads). While such a promiscuous extension of the term’s sphere of application runs the risk of anachronism (or, in the case of its application to other societies, cultural imperialism), it may also have the opposite effect, shaking loose some of the ingrained assumptions about what protest musicking can and does consist of.<sup>1</sup>

Facilitating this opening-up of the concept is the fact that the boundaries of both “protest” and “music” are fuzzy, shading off into other kinds of collective political action in the first instance (electoralism, armed insurrection, etc.) and into other cultural practices (chanting, street theater, etc.) and other auditory phenomena (noise, silence, etc.) in the second. Along similar lines, it is a short step from studying music *as* protest to studying music *in* protest (i.e., the sometimes planned though often spontaneous acts of musicking that take place in marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, etc.) or the music *of* protest (i.e., the sensuous and hence aesthetic character of protest events themselves). Such a broadening of the ways that music and protest can be articulated in turn opens the door to novel research agendas, for instance, the study of protest soundscapes. Indeed, as I discuss in the second half of this article, this has been one of the most active and compelling lines of inquiry in recent years. More generally, the tendency of protest musicking to overflow, in practice, the narrow coordinates imposed by the term “protest music” encourages the dispersal of research on the subject across a wide range of fields, each having not only a valid claim on the topic but also something of value to contribute to its study. Although this dispersal creates practical impediments to dialogue across disciplines—at a basic level, it is hard to keep track of the wide variety of work that is constantly being done on protest music—it also has the beneficial effect of diversifying the kinds of musics and movements addressed by people working on protest music.

The rest of this article will try to pick out some of the broader tendencies within the eclectic body of research on music and protest, with a particular focus on English-language scholarship published by scholars working in the US, Canada, and the UK. My aim is not simply descriptive, to give readers a sense of the current state of the discourse, though that is an important task in its own right. Rather, an additional goal of this survey is to provide some coordinates for a more productive dialogue across disciplines. The next section will offer an overview of work done on protest music in the two arenas that have contributed the most to discussions of this subject—social movement studies and music research. After that, I examine four broad themes that have emerged in recent writings:

- the importance of affect to music’s political efficacy, in particular its ability to move bodies and create novel collectivities
- studies of protest soundscapes, which have highlighted the fuzziness of the boundaries separating protest musicking from other sonic practices (e.g., making noise, performing silence, etc.)
- the infrastructural role played by media in circulating protest music, with an emphasis on more recent developments in digital and social media
- the political ambiguities of protest music, including the fact that forms of sonic expression that may set out to serve a movement may end up being detrimental to it

My discussion of the last theme will do double duty, also serving as a conclusion for the article as a whole. This is because the questions raised in reflecting on protest music’s uncertain impacts raise still other questions, pertaining to the political stakes involved in studying protest music. How should researchers balance their political and academic commitments, particularly when these do not cleanly align? How does scholarship on protest music potentially feed back onto activism? Should it? Does it necessarily assist the movements it documents through the act of documenting them? Or can it have a deleterious impact instead? Although there are no easy answers to questions like these, the very process of thinking them through, I would argue, may itself be productive: doing so may help to bring into sharper focus methodological and conceptual issues proper to the study of protest musicking. As such, they point toward a way of transforming the otherwise discrete and disconnected studies of protest music that abound at present into a field of protest music studies that would be interdisciplinary, in the best sense of the term.

## LISTENING TO PROTEST IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT STUDIES AND MUSIC STUDIES

To the extent that broader currents can be discerned within research on protest music, they have mainly coalesced in music studies and social movement studies, the latter a loose, interdisciplinary formation located at the interstices of sociology, anthropology, and political science. In the case of social movement studies, this work has been marked by the peculiar dynamics of the field's historical development, above all the post-1980s turn to culture (followed by subsequent turns to emotion, performativity, and narrative, among other things). This shift can be understood as a reaction to the paradigms dominant from the 1950s through the 1970s, which tended to emphasize the role of "hard" sociopolitical factors (e.g., social structure, the availability of resources, and rational choice models of political behavior) in explicating how, when, and under what conditions social movements were likely to take shape (Smelser 1962; Olson 1965; McCarthy and Zald 1973). To a degree, such historical approaches to the study of social movements simply reflected what were at the time hegemonic forms of social science research. But their adoption can also be seen as a strategic move, as part of a bid to legitimize social movement research and even social movements themselves. Against widely held beliefs that protests were the irrational outburst of unruly mobs—a perspective popularized by Gustav Le Bon's 1895 book *La psychologie des foules* (The crowd)—many researchers adopted the economism of rational choice theory as a way of casting activists as rational actors engaged in strategic, utility-maximizing behavior. Given this set of assumptions, the key question became how to solve the riddle raised by economist Mancur Olson in his influential text *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965), which asked why individuals take part in collective action when free-riding might allow them to enjoy the benefits of activism without assuming any of its considerable costs (e.g., time, psychic investment, and the risk of arrest or bodily harm). Among other things, the free-rider problem prompted a number of important avenues of inquiry, for instance, studies of the way changes in political opportunity structures alter the cost-benefit ratio of protest participation or how movement organizations vie for and deploy various kinds of resources. While many insights emerged from approaches like these, left unquestioned was rational choice theory's reductive image of the individual as a calculating, utility-maximizing agent as well as its strong commitment to methodological individualism—a curious point of departure for the study of collective action.

Following the growing institutionalization of social movement studies in the 1970s and 1980s—and as the shortcomings of rational choice models were becoming glaringly apparent—beginning in the 1980s, a number of issues previously repressed in the field made a conspicuous return. These included the centrality of cultural practices and traditions to activism (Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Reed 2005); the importance of emotion and moral shocks in mobilizing participation (Jasper 1997); the reciprocal influence of identity on movements and movements on identity (Melucci 1996); and the performativity of protest (Tilly 2008; Butler 2015; Juris 2015). These paradigm shifts allowed for a more robust understanding of how movements overcome the free-rider problem—or, perhaps more accurately, how this problem ends up being a non-issue for many movements. By painting a richer and less reductive account of social behavior, culturalist studies of protest underlined how sociocultural norms, shared values, and interpersonal bonds upset a narrow cost-benefit analysis of political participation. But the cultural turn also had the effect of opening up a space for research into the contributions made to protest movements by specific cultural and artistic practices, including music.

The key text in this regard is *Music and Social Movements* (1998), by sociologists Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, which stakes out something of a maximalist position as regards culture's place in social movements. Indeed, for Eyerman and Jamison, movements are cultural phenomena first and political phenomena second: "The labor movement, the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and the feminist and environmental movements...have all been more than merely political actors; their significance has been also—in many ways even more so—cultural" (8). Despite their rejection of earlier political-process and rational-choice models of social movements, the position staked out by Eyerman and Jamison retains one of their key premises, namely that "culture" and "politics" represent two crisply delineated domains. However, they simply reverse the priority



attached to these two terms. For Eyerman and Jamison, the long-term significance of a successful movement does not reside in the attainment of some immediate political goal, such as a change in policy or the (re) distribution of power relations. Rather, it resides in a longer-term transformation that movements engender in how people think and behave, which they refer to as “cognitive praxis” (7). This leads them to conclude that the principal contribution of social movements is to “effect major cultural shifts.” To this end, music functions as “a resource in the transformation of culture at this fundamental, existential level,” by serving to “reconstitute the structures of feeling, the cognitive codes, and the collective dispositions to act, that are culture” (173).

Other features of Eyerman and Jamison’s work are characteristic of the way protest music has been addressed in social movement studies more generally: its focus on US folk and popular musics, as well as its tendency to limit the discussion of songs almost exclusively to their lyrical content. Yet the same qualities of their work that have made it a touchstone in the study of protest music also show the limits of the culturalist approach they adopt. For one thing, maximalist accounts that equate social movements to cultural movements end up privileging certain kinds of musical practice over others. The authors’ stated intention to avoid treating music “instrumentally,” as a “kind of superstructural appendage” (19), for instance, means that the instrumental uses to which music is often put by activists end up being disregarded. By centering music’s role in the “mobilization of tradition” (p. 1; i.e., in connecting political work in the here-and-now to a longer historical continuum of struggle), *Music and Social Movements* brackets from consideration the more mundane, functional, and/or utilitarian roles that music often plays in activism. Yet this disregard for the “merely” functional irons out many of the tensions, ambiguities, and ambivalences that have historically characterized the relations between music and many social movements. (In this connection, the examples they cite—like the Black Freedom struggles of the 1950s and 1960s or the antiwar activism of the 1960s—perhaps bias their results, given the unparalleled centrality of music to these movements). Perhaps most consequentially, their treatment of music as an agent of cultural and cognitive transformation downplays music’s material, corporeal, and emotional dimensions. Yet these qualities are not only key to music’s ability to afford, canalize, and/or constrain political action; they are also impossible to disentangle from either cognition or culture in the first place. Registering this potential problem, Eyerman and Jamison contend at the end of their book’s introduction that music and other forms of cognitive praxis are “‘more’ than merely symbolic,” being “artefactual and material” as well (23). Yet this disclaimer does not entirely preclude a disembedding of the cultural from the material, since all it really accomplishes is to absorb whatever is non- or pre-cognitive into the cognitive, just as the political is absorbed into the cultural.

Other work within social movement studies on music and protest has managed to skirt the pitfalls of this sort of cultural maximalism. For instance, in a study of the benefit concerts, tours, and recordings that organizations like Greenpeace and Artists Against Apartheid organized in the 1980s, sociologist Christian Lahusen (1996) charts a middle path between culturalist and institutionalist approaches, balancing a consideration of music’s rhetorical functions with its value as a resource that can help mobilize still other resources (funds and publicity, but also political legitimacy, what he terms “protest capital”). The sociologists Vincent Roscigno and William Danaher (2004) take a different tack, directing their attention toward the media and physical infrastructures through which music circulates. Outlining the interaction of music, radio, and touring circuits within the Piedmont region of the US South in the 1920s and 1930s, they make a compelling case for the importance of mill songs in propagating pro-labor sentiment and a broader sense of collective identity across the region’s scattered communities in the run-up to the 1934 textile strike.

More recently, political scientist Lakeyta Bonnette-Bailey (2015) has brought political process models to bear upon hip-hop activism. She does this by examining organizations like the Hip Hop Summit Action Network or the Hip Hop Caucus, which were started by artists, industry leaders, and community activists who converted some of the cultural capital they had accrued in other domains to form institutions to advocate on behalf of reparations or to fight police brutality, among other things. These and other, related works share a concern with connecting music’s contributions to activism to the institutional and infrastructural contexts in which

they are situated. And while much of this work continues to privilege lyrics and the overt messages conveyed by song, other social movement scholars have begun taking steps toward engaging more directly with music's sonic, affective, and performative dimensions. Notable in this regard is the work of sociologist William Roy (2010), which maintains that the communicative functions of music are less important for social movements than the manner in which it is performed and/or experienced by activists. Contrasting the communist-led labor activism of the 1930s to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Roy contends that the latter had greater success in its use of music as a resource, thanks in large part to the rich history of collective song in Black churches that it could tap into. As a result, what ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino (2008, 26) has termed "participatory performance" played a much more central role in movement organizing among Civil Rights activists, in contrast to what he called the more "presentational" concert setting where committed folksingers of the 1930s performed on behalf of union members.

If studies like these have painted a more nuanced picture of how music's affective, performative, and rhetorical qualities interact with the institutional and organizational dimensions of social movements, it remains the case that most continue to privilege US (and, more broadly, Anglophone) repertoires and movements. With a handful of exceptions, social movement scholars have paid scant attention to musical traditions and protest musicking in other parts of the world, especially the Global South.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, discussion by social movement scholars of individual songs continues to center on the analysis of lyrics, with consideration of the music's sonic, formal, and aesthetic features either minimized or kept at the level of vague generalities. Yet the very division of academic labor that has dispersed protest music studies across disciplines means that where social movement studies falls short is where music studies has tended to pick up the slack. Here, too, the treatment of protest music is shaped by its disciplinary history and the peculiar place that those disciplines occupy within the academy. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say *places*, in the plural, since music studies is defined by its long-standing diffraction into a cluster of distinct areas of inquiry—ethnomusicology, popular music studies, historical musicology, music theory, music education, and so forth. Unsurprisingly, this disciplinary fissuring has had a significant impact on what kinds of protest musicking are studied and what methods are used to study them.

Among these different disciplines, popular music studies has been perhaps the most reliable in engaging with music's role in protest. There are several reasons for this. Not only does the mass appeal of commercial popular music make it an attractive vehicle for mass politics, but its importance to identity construction also makes it an invaluable resource for the forging of collectivities and the expression of sociopolitical difference. In a way, though, it is precisely because popular music studies has been such a consistent forum for the study of music and protest that it has not witnessed an appreciably marked uptick in research on the subject in recent years—at least not when compared with, say, ethnomusicology or historical musicology in the past decade or so. If anything, the most striking development has been in scholarship that seeks to problematize the facile tendency to map protest onto pop (Weinstein 2006). For the most part, however, work on protest music in popular music studies seems to ebb and flow along with changes in the movements themselves, from the early, pioneering research of sociologist Serge Denisoff (1972) on the use of "songs of persuasion" by movements and other social groups, to Reebee Garofalo's (1992) examination of mega-events like Live Aid in the 1980s and 1990s, to more recent work on the ways global hip-hop has been used by various subaltern communities across the world to make their voices heard (Malone and Martinez 2010; McDonald 2013; Clark and Koster 2014; Coppenrath 2022). At the same time, work on music and protest within popular music studies often blurs with research on other topics, related to but distinct from protest music. This is most notably the case with music's use as a medium of resistance, given that acts of resistance are often far more dissimulated, coded, and/or personalized than are acts of public protest. As such, the study of music as resistance, with its emphasis on decoding the "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990) embodied in a musical text or performance, presents unique methodological challenges, which can be quite different from those presented by the study of music in or as protest (Drott 2015).

Unlike the scholarship on music and protest in popular music studies, the work on this topic in both historical musicology and, above all, ethnomusicology has increased significantly in the past ten years, in tandem with the successive protest waves that have traversed the globe since the Great Financial Crisis of 2008. In terms of historical musicology, the ground was laid for this development by the “new musicology” of the 1980s and 1990s (Leppert and McClary 1987; McClary 1991) and its renewed engagement with music’s political entanglements—even if its main preoccupation was not studying political music *per se* but rather uncovering the latent sociopolitical content of putatively “contentless” musical forms. Two recent trends in the kinds of music history that are being written—not just by academic musicologists but by music critics and journalists as well—are also important. The first trend involves works that recount the history (or “biography”) of a particular song or piece of music. Within this genre of music history, political and protest works are particularly well represented. Among the works that have enjoyed this treatment are “We Shall Not Be Moved” (No nos moverán) (Spener 2016), “Strange Fruit” (Margolick 2001), Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (Buch 2004), and the series of Afrodiasporic anthems whose histories have been powerfully recounted by music scholar Shana Redmond (2014).

A second trend might be dubbed the “eventization” of historical research on music. Among scholars working across a range of disciplines, traditional studies of artists, musical communities, and/or musical styles have ceded considerable ground to studies situating music in proximity to some significant sociohistorical event or occasion. These include World War II (Fauser 2013); Germany’s postwar occupation and reconstruction (Anderton 2019); the collapse of the Soviet bloc, synechdochally figured by the fall of the Berlin Wall (Clover 2010; Brodsky 2017); the 9/11 attacks (Ritter and Daughtry 2007); the ensuing “Global War on Terror” (Cusick 2008); and Hurricane Katrina (Le Menestrel and Henry 2010; Turner 2017). Within this model of historical research, uprisings and protest movements are well represented, with recent studies and edited volumes dedicated to music’s place in the 1848 revolutions in Germany and elsewhere across Europe (John and Robb 2020), the global uprisings of 1968 (Drott 2011; Kutschke and Norton 2013), the Civil Rights movement in the United States (Monson 2007), Solidarity in Poland (Bohlman 2016, 2020), the Baltic “singing revolutions” of 1990–91 (Šmidchens 2014), and Occupy Wall Street (Drott 2017), among others. Despite their differences in subject matter and methodology, many of these studies share a concern with the way music’s articulation with activism shapes not only movements’ sociopolitical effects but also the day-to-day lives of musicians and musical communities. At the same time, approaching activism from the somewhat oblique angle of music offers scholars a different perspective than the one provided by social movement studies, throwing into relief certain tensions, fissures, and differences that may be masked by the politically expedient facade of unity that movements seek to project. Such is the case, for example, in musicologist Andrea Bohlman’s (2016, 2020) treatment of music’s multiple intersections with the Solidarity movement. Looking past the protest songs and anthems that are typically identified with Solidarity and that help lend it a sense of cohesiveness, Bohlman refocuses attention on the more quotidian forms of music-making and sonic activism that took place within the movement. By attending to this diffuse set of musical practices, Bohlman is able to account for the diffuseness of Solidarity itself, dispelling its somewhat mythic (self-)representation as a coherent, unified coalition.

Even more than historical studies, ethnographic research has arguably been the site of the most significant work on music, protest, and social movements since 2010, in qualitative as well as quantitative terms. Events on the ground appear to have been decisive in spurring this development. Indeed, one often gets the impression that researchers who had gone to do fieldwork on some local music scene or tradition ended up changing tack upon being caught up in local political upheavals; ethnomusicologist Benjamin Teitelbaum, for instance, has described how his initial plan to study the rhythmic structure of traditional Swedish folk music was derailed once he realized how this repertoire was being appropriated by nationalist activists in the country.<sup>3</sup> Whether Teitelbaum’s experience is representative or exceptional, the simple fact that so many researchers have been able to bear aural witness to contemporary protest movements in real time has been the



source of vital new insights into music's articulation with contentious politics. Examples include anthropologist Lila Gray's (2016) writings on music produced in response to the austerity measures imposed in Portugal during the post-2008 eurozone crisis; the research conducted by the ethnomusicologists Marié Abe (2016), Noriko Manabe (2015), and David Novak (2017) on music in protests against nuclear power in Japan after Fukushima; anthropologist Omotayo Jolaosho's (2015, 2019) analyses of "sung protests" in post-Apartheid South Africa; Tausig's (2019) work on the soundscape of the Red Shirts uprising in Thailand; ethnomusicologist Ana Hofman's (2020a, 2020b) ethnographic studies of activist choirs in the former Yugoslavia; ethnomusicologist Darci Sprengel's (2019) examination of the strategies used by DIY musicians to navigate the treacherous political landscape of postrevolutionary Egypt; or the reflections that ethnomusicologist Elyse Carter Vosen (2019) and artist-curator-writer Dylan Robinson (2021) have made on their experiences as participant-observers in Idle No More, an Indigenous rights movement that originated in Canada but has expanded into the United States and beyond. Interventions like these have been invaluable for expanding the horizons of research on music and protest beyond the US-centric work that has dominated research to date. But they have also decentered work on music and protest in another way—not just culturally and geographically but chronologically. That is to say, the recency of the movements under consideration has brought to light novel sonic tactics and repertoires employed by activists, many of which have developed in response to the changing political circumstances of late neoliberalism and the attendant anti-democratic backsliding seen in many parts of the world, including the United States. This article now turns to these new practices, and the new methodologies and paradigms that have emerged in conjunction with them.

## FOUR TRENDS

### SOUND AND AFFECT / SOUND AS AFFECT

One of the most pronounced developments in protest music scholarship since the early 2010s has involved a turn away from lyrics, as well as other verbal and/or representational modes of communication, toward the non-representational qualities of sound and affect. Indeed, the latter two phenomena are often seen as inextricably linked, with sound possessing a materiality and liveliness that make it an ideal medium for the transmission of affect. This tendency aligns with broader shifts underway in the humanities and social sciences, as affect theory, along with various "new" or "vital" materialisms, has seen its influence wax over the first few decades of the new millennium.<sup>4</sup> What these different currents share is an interest in that which is deemed to precede or fall outside language, representation, and/or cognition and whose ready transmission from one body to another enables interactions that transcend the social, narrowly construed, to encompass all sorts of human-nonhuman encounters. By this line of argument, the political import of nonrepresentational impulses and affective intensities is to be found in the way they help forge new kinds of community, bringing human and nonhuman actors together on grounds other than those provided by signifiers like identity or ideology.<sup>5</sup>

Initially, at least, the turn to affect was a reaction to the cultural and linguistic turns of the 1980s and 1990s, though more recent work has problematized a binaristic opposition of affect and language, a topic I will return to shortly. Meanwhile, a parallel transformation has taken place within the more narrow purview of protest music studies, in response to the historical privileging of protest songs' lyrics at the expense of the material qualities of musical sound. This historical reliance on lyrics and other semiotic cues (e.g., paratexts) is understandable. Questions of musical technique remain specialist knowledge, while the workings of musical affect are, for many people, easier to describe than they are to explain. The formal and sonic dimensions of protest music have also been neglected, even among music scholars, perhaps out of a misplaced belief that as a largely functional repertoire that eschews technical complexity, protest music does not have much of strictly musical

interest to analyze. Whatever the case may be, the turn to sound and affect has had a number of salutary effects, including rebalancing discourse on music and protest to train attention on features that distinguish music from other forms of political expression.

It would be a mistake, however, to see this intensified concern with protest music's sonic and affective dimensions as simply a function of academic fashion. Also—and more importantly—the focus on sound and affect would seem to reflect changes taking place in practices of protest musicking themselves. Consider the role that the genre of grime music played in the 2010 student-led protests in the UK, a revolt sparked by the Conservative government's proposal to raise university fees and cut funding for public higher education. Recalling how grime served as a “soundtrack” to raucous street demonstrations, music scholars Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle (2013) remark that it was at once a puzzling choice and entirely fitting: puzzling, since it was a thoroughly commercial music that had “no overt political content” (3); and yet fitting, since it was closely identified with economically marginalized and racially stigmatized groups (e.g., working-class Black youth). Perhaps most important was its “fierce” and “aggressive” sound, which conjured an atmosphere well suited for the expression of social discontent (2013, 3n3). For Thompson and Biddle, the music's political significance resided not in some “message of opposition [it gave] people to rally around and to identify with” but in the way it “mobilized bodies” through its “induction, modulation, and circulation of moods, feelings, and intensities” (5).

Consider, as well, Robinson's (2021) vivid recollections of the kind of affective work that sound and movement performed as part of an Idle No More action in a shopping mall in Victoria, British Columbia, in which he and other Indigenous activists reclaimed the land on which the structure was built. Having occupied the central atrium, singers filled the mall with their voices while the dancers danced around them. “To describe the material circumstances of this gathering is much easier than to describe what it felt like to participate in it,” Robinson writes. Above all, he recalls “a sense of hopefulness and ‘fullness’ [that] was amplified” as “our exuberance occup[ied] this corporate space” (227). Importantly, the affect produced by the joint action of song and dance had a very different character than the grime that featured prominently in the UK student protests. Instead of being used to stoke or channel discontent, the affect conjured through the sonic occupation of a commercial space sought to dispel settler-colonial representations of (irrational) Indigenous anger. The music and dance, Robinson recounts, served to undermine the widespread tendency to regard Indigenous activism “as the purview of ‘unhappy Others’ ” and “angry Indians.” While “we may still be angry,” Robinson writes, “*we are also asking you to dance*” (228, italics in the original). To be sure, the signifying dimension of these songs was hardly irrelevant; as Vosen (2019) remarks, the Round Dance performances that were a staple of Idle No More actions speak “a language that emerges directly from Indigenous experience” (92). As such, their import was as much symbolic as it was affective. Even so, what Robinson's account makes clear is how for both Indigenous activists and the colonial-settler subjects they hailed, much of music's political efficacy resided in the affects they aroused, whose extra-discursive immediacy enabled new forms of solidarity to emerge.

Subsequent work on sound and affect in protest has pushed further still by arguing that much of the political force of phenomena conventionally associated with consciousness, language, and/or representational thought derives from an asignifying, affective dimension that lurks within them. Discussing the song “Parva que Sou” (How stupid [foolish] I am), by the band Deolinda, Gray (2016) notes how its narrative of downwardly mobile youth whose future had been foreclosed by post-crisis austerity politics in Portugal held a special resonance on account of both its subject matter and the way it condensed past(s) and present. Ironically referencing (and subverting) fado tropes while also being heard by many as marking a return of the *canção de protesto* (protest songs) that had last been “politically salient” in the years around the 1974 military coup that ended the Salazar dictatorship, Deolinda's song, Gray contends, effectively transmutes historical consciousness into affective experience. As such, the song demonstrates how “musical experience...has a way of collapsing history as chronology, history as *telos*, condensing affect,” with the result that history comes to be experienced not as a series of images or representations but “as a feeling” (62).

In her work on activist choirs in the former Yugoslavia, Hofman (2020a) has likewise underlined how affect imbues even those domains, like ideology, to which it is often opposed. A defining trait of these choirs is their recycling of antifascist partisan songs of World War II, a repertoire that fell out of fashion during the ethnic strife of the 1990s and which remains out of step with the neoliberal policies ascendent in the Balkans since then. The appeal of this repertoire partly stems from its identification with antifascist struggle. It also stems from the songs' lyrical content, whose staunch socialist commitments provide a riposte to the dominant capitalist culture. But as Hofman points out, "for singers, lyrics are not the most important trigger of a song's mobilizing force." Rather, this force is to be found in the way the songs are able to "mediate a particular set of ideas and values through somatic means" (97). If, according to Gray, history is experienced as affect in Deolinda's "Parva que Sou," for Hofman it is ideology that is experienced in these same terms, via activist choirs' nostalgic revival of partisan song.

While studies like Hofman's and Gray's exemplify how the purview of affect has progressively expanded to absorb things conventionally understood to lie beyond its pale, sound continues to occupy a central place in accounts of affect's circulation. Along with music, sound is ascribed an extraordinary capacity to move bodies, shape atmospheres, and forge new collectivities, and this is so not despite but precisely because sound and music defy straightforward articulation. And yet, just as some scholars have begun to turn up the workings of affect in unlikely places (ideology, historical representation), others have begun to locate in musical sound a capacity for articulation that its reduction to a mere bearer of affect risks obscuring. An important intervention in this respect is ethnomusicologist Farzaneh Hemmasi's (2013) analysis of veiled protest in Iranian *musiqi-ye pāp* (pop music), focusing on singer-composer Dariush's setting of "Pariyā," which was written and recorded in the years immediately preceding the ouster of Shah Pahlavi and the institution of the Islamic Republic. Significantly, the lyrics for the song were drawn from a poem by "new poet" Shamlu, whose thinly veiled allegory of the toppling of an oppressive regime nonetheless managed to skirt censorship, thanks to the text's fairy-tale setting and use of formulae drawn from children's games (66). Also important, Hemmasi notes, is that poetry—especially spoken poetry—occupies a gray zone somewhere between music and ordinary speech, between the asignifying and the signifying (57). More striking still is that Dariush's subsequent musical setting drew the ire of censors, even as Shamlu's poem had skirted it. Hemmasi cites a number of reasons for this discrepant treatment. One concerns the wider circulation of commercial popular music compared with poetry. Another concerns musical choices that Dariush made in setting the poem. Particularly important was his use of the Dashti mode, associated with mourning in Iran through its frequent use in passion plays depicting the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (73). In this instance, Hemmasi underlines, neither music nor affect was a source of semantic indeterminacy. On the contrary, the affects generated through the poem's musical rendering served to disambiguate the poem's meaning, complicating accounts that see music's (and affect's) political potency as residing in its resistance to denotative meaning (75). If anything, such a blurring—or, better still, dialectization—of affect and signification, sound and words, needs to be pushed further still. As Thompson has noted elsewhere, affect should not be regarded as "either/or but rather [as] both/and—for better and worse" (2017, 10). This in turn suggests that we should exercise caution in evaluating the political utility or valence of affect; as Thompson notes, "affect cannot be simply taken, politically speaking, as a way out" (10). Hence, in addition to identifying the affective kernel at work in historical consciousness or ideology, scholars should observe a reciprocal imperative: to historicize affect and to explore what ideological functions it serves.

#### PROTEST SOUNDSCAPES

A notable trait of many studies of protest musicking's affective powers is that they focus less on musical *texts* (i.e., "protest songs") than on situated *performances*. The latter are to be understood in the broadest possible sense, encompassing both musical performances, conventionally understood, and what sociologist Charles Tilly

(2006) has dubbed “contentious performances” (i.e., any public display of discontent). “Presenting a petition, taking a hostage, or mounting a demonstration,” Tilly writes, “constitutes a *performance* linking at least two actors, a claimant and an object of claims” (35). Of course, affect is not only transmitted in public performance but can also be transmitted via songs and recordings listened to, say, in the privacy of one’s own home, as the example of Dariush’s “Pariyā” makes clear. Yet the intensity and fluidity of the feelings provoked in street protest and other public spaces makes them particularly salient to scholars working at the intersection of music, politics, and affect. From this perspective, the turn to affect is one of the major catalysts driving a related preoccupation with the event of protest and the place of music and sound within it. Informed above all by the advent of sound studies, work on protest soundscapes tends to situate musicking within a broader continuum of non-, extra-, or paramusical sounds.<sup>6</sup> Examples include Manabe’s (2019) close reading of the rhythms and formal patterns of protest chants in the New York City Women’s March of January 2017; studies of *cacerolazo* (pots and pans) protests in Argentina and elsewhere (Eltantawy 2008; Sterne 2012; Minuchin 2014); anthropologist Roshanak Kheshti’s (2015) discussion of the collective rooftop chanting of “Allah-O-Akbar” during the 2009 “Green Revolution” in Iran; anthropologist Laura Kunreuther’s (2018) survey of a variety of sonic tactics used by activists in Kathmandu (honking horns, banging on plates, broadcasting the recordings of people crying, silence); and Tausig’s (2019) wide-ranging ethnography of the various “sonic niches” that comprised the Red Shirt protests of 2010–11 in Thailand.

As inquiry into the sounds of protest has expanded outward from the privileged point long occupied by music, two sonic phenomena have come in for particular scrutiny. The first is noise, which often assumes an allegorical quality for writers on music, protest, and resistance. A point of reference for such work is Jacques Attali’s *Noise* (1985), which casts noise (in both its acoustic and information-theoretical senses) as a disruptive force that stands against some hegemonic social order. Or at least it does for a period of time, since, in Attali’s telling, noise tends to give rise to a new order in place of the old one that it scrambles, before being disrupted in turn by a new source of noise, starting the cycle over again. Put differently, while particular noises invariably end up being assimilated into order, what remains obstinately inassimilable according to Attali is Noise with a capital *N* (i.e., noise as a sensuous figuration of disorder). It is the latter conception that lends itself readily to allegorical or metaphoric readings. This is nowhere more evident than in popular music studies, where noise often serves as an interpretive frame for addressing musics associated with marginal and/or subaltern groups. According to this framing, such musics function as a noise contesting some dominant social system or ideology (e.g., White supremacy, patriarchy, settler colonialism, or caste-based oppression); think, for instance, of the title of Africana studies and American studies scholar Tricia Rose’s (1994) foundational book on hip-hop, *Black Noise*, or the millennial survey of hip-hop’s worldwide dissemination, *Global Noise* (Mitchell 2001).

This way of approaching the politics of music and sound also features prominently in readings of protest as such. Describing how the annual Project Fukushima festival has sought to recast conceptions of the city whose name is now indelibly linked to the nearby nuclear power plant that failed in March 2011, David Novak, for instance, notes how its organizers use “the noise of festival to disrupt the national silence surrounding the ongoing meltdown” (2017, 240). Likewise, performance studies scholar Sheila Malone (2017) has described how Dykes on Bikes—a loose association started in San Francisco in the 1970s, which has since grown into a trademarked organization with chapters worldwide—has used the thundering rumble of motorcycles as a means of combating the silencing of lesbian voices, not just by mainstream society in the United States and abroad but also by what was, in its early, post-Stonewall years, a largely White and male-dominated queer rights movement.

In other cases, making noise may be a tactic that activists resort to when other ways of expressing dissent have been restricted; examples include the car horns that drivers honked during the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in 2014 or the public hand-clapping that citizens of Belarus performed to signal their opposition to the Lukashenko government in 2011 (Barry 2011). Yet the same qualities that make noise an effective “weapon of the weak” (Scott 1985) make it just as useful a tool that the powerful can use to entrench their position. Malone



(2017), for one, contrasts the noisiness of the Dykes on Bikes protests to similar tactics employed by the pro-police and pro-military organization Thin Blue Line MC, which has used the deafening noise of motorcycles to drown out the sound of anti-death penalty protesters. Or one might think of the long-range acoustic devices (aka “sound cannons”) that police have used to disperse protesters. Related to this political indeterminacy is still another limit to noise-making as a protest tactic, namely its strong potential for unintelligibility. A case in point is provided by protests against the US military presence in Ecuador in the early 2000s, as discussed by anthropologist Erin Fitz-Henry (2016). Local activists, Fitz-Henry recounts, adopted a “carnavalesque mode of social protest” (6) in their campaign against a US military facility located in the city of Manta. Influenced by the “carnivals against capital” staged by anti- and alter-globalization protesters in the 1990s and early 2000s, local activists organized a caravan featuring drummers, puppets, masks, papier-mâché effigies, street theater, and the like, all in order to foster a playful and festive atmosphere, while they denounced the scourge of US imperialism. Yet their protest was met with incomprehension among many residents of Manta. Fitz-Henry recalls onlookers asking her to explain the point of the march: “What was this all about? they asked me, over and over again.... What had drumming to do with the U.S. Air Force?” (7). What this anecdote underlines is that even if noise-making can help the inaudible to become audible—a critical first step in social change, especially for those excluded from the public sphere—this alone may not be enough. In other words, audibility, while necessary, may not be sufficient: even if noisiness can help ensure that people are heard, it does not ensure that they are listened to, let alone understood.

This brings us to a second auditory phenomenon that features prominently in both protest soundscapes and writings on the subject: silence. Again, Fitz-Henry’s (2016) work on activism in Ecuador offers a vivid illustration. In contrast to the carnivalesque tactics adopted by anti-US military protesters, environmental activists opposed to then-president Rafael Correa’s ongoing support for oil and natural resource extraction adopted a markedly different approach. In December 2013, the offices of the environmentalist NGO Fundación Pachamama were raided by police, who bore papers formally dissolving the group. In response, staff gathered outside their shuttered offices a few days later with black duct tape placed over their mouths, a striking image that garnered significant media coverage. That the most effective way of making oneself heard may sometimes involve making no sound at all is borne out by other examples, both recent and historical. Among recent instances, one might cite performance artist Erdem Gündüz’s silent “Standing Man” protest of the brutal police clearing of Gezi Park in Istanbul, which was interpreted by anthropologist Zeynep Devrim Gürsel (2013) as a trenchant inversion of the police command to “stop” or “freeze.”<sup>7</sup> Among historical instances, one might cite the 1917 silent march that the NAACP organized to protest lynching, following the vicious anti-Black pogrom unleashed in East St. Louis in July of the same year. As was the case with National Football League quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s silent refusal to stand during the singing of the national anthem nearly a hundred years later, this performance of Black civility was, by racist standards of decorum, deemed profoundly *uncivil*; it violated White-supremacist norms that held Black citizens’ “democratic engagement as out of place, unbecoming, and inappropriate” (Golding 2022, 29).

Examples like these make it clear that silence does not necessarily signal disempowerment, despite the commonplace tendency to equate the voice and vocalization with political agency. This is a key observation made by ethnomusicologist Rebecca Lentjes (2021), in her incisive reading of the silent opposition put up by patients, volunteers, and staff in the face of the violent form of sonic patriarchy enacted by anti-abortion clinic protests. Drawing on the work of ethnomusicologist Nomi Dave (2014), whose work on sound and violence in Guinea has problematized the normative equation of music with voice (and hence with political agency), Lentjes notes how silence, far from connoting voicelessness or victimization, instead functions as “a valuable tool for resistance within the sonic politics of the US abortion wars” (306). Confronted by anti-abortion clinic protesters, who endeavor to ventriloquize on behalf of a voiceless fetus—a “male voice [that] sounds out *in defense* of the fetus while also performing an identification *with* the fetus” (310, italics in the original)—many



patients, clinic workers, and escorts opt for a politics of refusal: in contrast to those who use music to try to mask the sounds of sonic patriarchy, others have adopted a “minimum engagement policy” (318), which rests upon the power of “not-listening” (306). Taking leave of a politics of sonic domination, the silence adopted by those seeking or providing abortion care is shown to be no less an “active...assertion of agency as making noise in response to noise” (319).

#### MEDIA ECOSYSTEMS

Another issue increasingly centered in protest music scholarship is media’s role in shaping and/or disseminating protest music, a concern no doubt amplified by the massive changes the media landscape has undergone since the late 1990s. Social movement studies more broadly have also focused on media, being particularly interested in how social movement organization and strategy have been affected by mass media’s partial and uneven displacement by networked social media over the past twenty-plus years. The result has been a fundamental transformation in how movements and movement actors engage with media, and vice versa.

Throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, movements depended on mass media outlets (print journalism, radio, television, etc.) to publicize their activities and to do so in a way that accommodated—or at least did not distort—their desired framing of an issue or struggle. The first of these conditions was far easier to satisfy than the second, given that in most cases major media outlets have been under the control of, or closely aligned with, elite interests and thus hostile to those challenging the status quo. In response to their frequent vilification or neglect by corporate- or state-owned media, movements have formulated a number of different responses, what sociologist Dieter Rucht (2004) enumerates as the four As: *abstention* from mainstream outlets; the creation of *alternative* means of political communication; influencing coverage by *attacking* the media; and/or *adaptation*. Viewed from a certain angle, protest music itself has often performed one (or more) of these roles, in some cases functioning as an alternative channel for political expression, while in others serving as a vehicle for adaptation (i.e., a means by which marginal voices and positions can be made legible for the mainstream).

The development of the internet and later social media have often been heralded as a boon for activists, opening up opportunities for communication by substituting a decentralized, many-to-many network topology for the centralized, one-to-many architecture of the traditional mass media. In addition, the internet and social media enable activists to abandon rigid institutional and organizational forms, resulting in a profound shift in how activism is conducted. This shift is summed up by what political scientists Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2013) have dubbed the logic of “connective action,” which is operative in many networked social movements. In contrast to collective action, which usually requires that individuals risk some sacrifice for the sake of a broader collective good, connective action is structured by the “loose” or “weak” ties (50) linking individuals to a network of like-minded activists. For Bennett and Segerberg, the fact that political organization has mutated in tandem with new forms of political communication is symptomatic of a broader weakening of institutional affiliation across late modern societies. This interpretation echoes sociologist Manuel Castells’s arguments concerning how networking technologies have the effect of amplifying and expanding existing activist networks, enabling the latter to forgo “formal leadership, [a] command and control center, or a vertical organization to distribute information or instructions” (2015, 249). The result is a trade-off. On the one hand, networked social movements can often mobilize participants more quickly, thanks to both the affordances of digital technologies and the way connective action obviates many of the obstacles impeding collective action; in this, the dynamic interplay of online and offline activism bears out observations made by Castells and others regarding the interpenetration of these otherwise analytically distinct spaces. On the other hand, groups that are mobilized quickly also have a tendency to dissipate quickly, lacking the durability that older, “vertical” forms of social movement organization possessed. As sociologist Zeynep Tufekci notes, “the ability to use digital tools to rapidly amass large numbers of protesters with a common goal empowers

movements” but can also create longer-run challenges by allowing them to sidestep “some of the traditional tasks of organizing” (2017, xxiii).

Many of the changes that networked media have prompted in the organization and communication strategies of movements find parallels in the more specific case of protest music’s circulation online. In her wide-ranging account of anti-nuclear activism in post-Fukushima Japan, Manabe (2015), for example, has observed how the speed, decentralization, and pseudonymity granted by many Web 2.0 platforms (e.g., YouTube or Ustream) enabled musicians to distribute music outside a Japanese media apparatus beholden to the “nuclear village,” the interlocking set of political and business interests invested in maintaining the country’s nuclear industry. For artists signed to major record companies, the internet offered a way of releasing anti-nuclear songs that their labels would not countenance—a case in point being Saitō Kazuyoshi’s “Zutto uso dattandaze” (It was always a lie), a remake of his 1993 hit “Zutto suki dattandaze” (I always loved you; Manabe 2015, 117–119). For less mainstream artists, online distribution allowed them to broadcast their criticisms of the nuclear village and to mobilize actions offline. Thus the group Frying Dutchmen leveraged the attention their 2011 song “Human Error” garnered to organize a “parade of one million” on the one-year anniversary of Japan’s 3.11 disaster, forging “an imaginary community of people, connected by playing the song from disparate locations” (Manabe 2015, 140). Here we can see many of the hallmarks of both networked activism and networked protest music: the interpenetration of online and offline spaces, the use of social media to rapidly organize spatially dispersed actions, but also a certain looseness and impermanence in the network thus catalyzed.

The interest generated by new forms of networked media has gone hand in hand with a reassessment of the role played by older, analog media in propagating musical dissent. A number of important antecedents exist for such research, including studies of the politics of cassette culture in India (Manuel 1993) and Iran (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994), radio’s role in fostering militancy in the Depression-era South (Roscigno and Danaher 2004), and, more recently, the important role played by community radio during the 2006 Oaxacan uprising (Rogers 2006; Stewart, forthcoming). More recent research has pushed further in this direction, often drawing on developments in media theory to build sophisticated accounts of how music, media, and political culture interact. A notable example is the way musicologist Glenda Goodman (2017) deploys insights from both traditional bibliographic research and more recent scholarship on digital media in her interpretation of the varied political uses to which contrafacts of “God Save the King” were put before, during, and after the American War of Independence. Noting that music of the era “circulated in multiple formats” (395), Goodman is particularly sensitive to how “the material properties of musical texts contributed to the significance of political songs,” such that “musicality, materiality, and message were intertwined” (396). Thus, while the inclusion of certain religiously themed contrafacts in hymnals enabled them to “infiltrat[e] religious spaces,” the song’s appearance in broadsheets and manuscript books—disposable formats that were easy and cheap to produce in bulk—facilitated the rapid diffusion of versions that parodically inverted the song’s glorification of the British monarchy. “Through mockery and mimicry,” Goodman writes, “broadside printers were able to react swiftly to the fast changing political climate of the Revolutionary period” (401).

Furthermore, just as work on networked protest has consistently stressed the interpenetration of online and offline activism, so too have scholars drawn attention to the way so-called new media have not supplanted “old” media but have come to exist alongside them, creating a hybrid media environment through which protest music and other forms of political communication move. This mix of old and new media is particularly apparent in periods and places where the implantation of the internet and social media has not yet reached a critical mass. In Ukraine during the run-up to the 2004 Orange Revolution, for instance, the internet emerged as a key nexus for circulating news beyond the reach of government censorship, making it an important resource for opponents of then-president Leonid Kuchma. And yet only a small fraction of the population had access to the internet in the early 2000s, meaning that broad dissemination of news stories often took the form of “printouts from the Internet,” which expanded the “information network to non-virtual contexts” (Helbig

2006, 86). Here, the interpenetration of online and offline activity occurred in the movement of information from pixel to paper. Similarly, while many Orange Revolution protest songs were downloaded directly from the internet, they also circulated more widely by being burned onto CDs. Moreover, the new medium of the internet was also used to publicize music broadcast through a much older medium, that of live performance.

Such dynamics persist elsewhere, as can be seen in Tausig's (2019) far-reaching study of the sonic atmospheres of the Red Shirt protests of 2010–11 in Thailand. At the time of the uprising, only a fifth of the country's population had access to the internet. By contrast, twice as many citizens had access to local community radio, making it a more effective resource for political communication and mobilization, with music a major part of the stations' programming (and hence appeal). When the government cracked down on community stations in response, it did not end up "restoring a centralized structure" but instead "produced the opposite outcome." Rather, "[s]mall media proliferated," albeit in shifting forms (70). While certain stations preserved a web presence, a large number transferred operations to mobile sound trucks, which could be deployed to Red Shirt protests and encampments in Bangkok. A photo reproduced by Tausig (71, fig. 4.4) encapsulates the way different media—old and new, audio and visual—overlapped in complex configurations. It shows an image of a sound truck operated by a radio station based in the coastal city of Pattaya. On its top are mounted speakers, while hanging from its side is a red banner giving the station's name and call number as well as its web address. The dissident music played on pro-Red Shirt stations like this could thus be heard across a number of formats—on the airwaves, over the internet, or "live" in person, depending on the circumstances. One would be hard-pressed to find a better example of the hybrid media environment that protest sound moves through today.

Consideration of how media shapes protest and protest musicking has also led some scholars to interrogate how the materialities of the archive shape research on music and social movements. The music of protest resounds differently depending on whether it is translated into words on the printed page, captured on a noisy cassette tape, or heard in the background of an archival radio broadcast. Elsewhere in his work on the Red Shirts, Tausig (2019) comments on the experience of sitting at a CD vendor's stall and listening to an "atrocious tape," a term he uses to describe recordings of soldiers assaulting ordinary citizens (in this instance a young man). While the tape made audible the violence that Thailand's nominally peaceful transition to neoliberal modernity both required and concealed, Tausig's recording of the moment of its playback makes audible still other things. The recording, Tausig writes, presented "a sonification of the existential noise of human experience," a sensory overload that requires that "listeners listen in excess, to memory and to promises, which together make the present throb." Among those implicated in this excess was Tausig himself, in his capacity as ethnographer: "This sound recording represented noisy co-presence both for the protesters and for the researcher listening among them" (61).

A similar reflexivity is manifest in Bohlman's (2020) work on music and the Solidarity movement in Poland, above all in relation to the materiality—sonic and otherwise—of the varied sources she drew on. Discussing an "issue" of Stefan Bratkowski's *Sound Gazette*, one in a series of clandestine audiotapes that collaged together spoken-word news reports and other underground sounds, Bohlman notes how the present-day dispersal of copies across archives in different parts of the world attests to the twisting paths the tapes took as they furtively changed hands: "Each tape is a unique record of its contents' circulation.... They reveal a particular route through the hands (and, presumably, ears) of members of and sympathizers with the Polish opposition to state socialism" (24). The tapes' travels through geography and history also attest to the medium's affordances for clandestine communication; as Bohlman notes, they provide concrete evidence of the "networks of exchanges these cassettes' portability and recordability facilitated" (24). But perhaps most important, they revealed the "stakes of listening" (25), not only for activists and ordinary citizens living under martial law in Poland in the 1980s but also for later generations of researchers.

## THE AMBIVALENCES OF MUSICAL PROTEST

The final tendency to be discussed here—which will also serve as a conclusion for this article—concerns scholars' increased interest in situations where musicking does not necessarily help movements, and may even harm them. Drawing attention to the ambivalence of musical protest marks a significant break, since most past work on music in social movements has tended to focus on how it can advance a cause. In a way, this bias simply follows from the fact that the tacit question guiding much research on music and protest—What is it that music can do for activism?—is conceived in largely positive terms. What this framing excludes is its negative counterpart: What is it that music can't do, or can't do very well? Or, to place the accent in a different place, what is it that music can do but that would be counterproductive? Although emphasis on music's positive contributions may in part be a matter of expedience—it is much easier, after all, to demonstrate the presence of something rather than its absence—it may also have to do with the fact that music scholars in particular have a vested interest in making a case for music's social significance. A book like media studies scholar David Hesmondhalgh's *Why Music Matters* (2013) is representative, since embedded in its title is the assumption that music does indeed matter, for politics as well as for social life more broadly. Also implied by this title (as well as the book itself) is the idea that it is the scholar's duty to make a case on music's behalf. But what if music doesn't always matter or doesn't matter as much as other, more pressing concerns? Or if it matters not in a good but in a bad way, because its effects are detrimental, even regressive?

One of the clearest expressions of scholars' increasing caution in addressing music's contributions to movements can be seen in sociologists Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks's *Playing for Change* (2011). After hundreds of pages detailing the positive impact music can have in effecting social change, a chapter toward the end of the book broaches the question of “how musicking harms movements” (181). Rosenthal and Flacks enumerate a number of music's potential drawbacks. These include the fact that so much popular culture is decidedly apolitical and thus tacitly supportive of the status quo (181), that even political music is likely to be regarded as “just entertainment” by listeners conditioned to keep art and politics separate (183), that music may function as a substitute for or distraction from concrete political action (185–186), and that it might paper over fault lines within movements by presenting a false facade of unanimity (190).

While Rosenthal and Flacks are perhaps exceptional for devoting so much space to the potential problems music can create for activism, other scholars have taken note of other, more pointed ways music's political impact may be muted or contradictory. Goodman (2017), for instance, notes how contrafacts of “God Save the King,” whose efficacy derived from the way they desacralized the political authority that the original venerates, also served to sustain the cultural dependence of the newly independent United States on the British Empire, playing out the “simultaneous desire to emulate and reject hegemonic culture” typical of later postcolonial states (394). In my own work on music and protest, a theme that resurfaces time and again is how “social struggles waged *by means of* music often get caught up in struggles *over music*” (Drott 2019, 9, italics in the original). This pattern is illustrated by the controversies that surrounded the drum circle that was a fixture of the encampment at Zuccotti Park (aka Liberty Plaza) in Lower Manhattan in fall 2011 (Drott 2017) and was the epicenter of the broader Occupy movement the protest camp helped to inspire. Notably, the very qualities that made the drumming beneficial for the Liberty Plaza occupation also made it nettlesome. The noise it created drew in curious passers-by, some of whom donated money and, in certain cases, even joined the movement; but it also threatened to drown out the political dialogue taking place within the park, including the nightly meetings of the General Assembly. At a symbolic level, whatever virtues the drum circle had in embodying the sort of leaderless and horizontal self-organization found in Occupy Wall Street (OWS) were offset by other, less helpful associations, especially those connected to White appropriation of Indigenous and African cultural practices, as well as the sense that the drumming was emblematic of the profound unseriousness of OWS. Regarding this last point, critics of Occupy on both the left and the right seized on the drum circle as an emblem of the way participants



had forsworn the hard work of drafting demands, forging alliances, and formulating strategy to indulge, instead, in carnivalesque play and self-gratification. As one left commentator argued, what OWS needed was “a little more politics and a little less partying” (Wolfe, quoted in Drott 2017, 640).

The ambivalence of musical protest also extends to the movements whose sonic practices researchers examine. As is true of social movement studies more broadly, there has been a long-standing tendency among scholars of protest music to focus most of their efforts on activism located on the left side of the political spectrum (a broad category that extends from center-left liberalism through progressivism to more radical anti-systemic movements). Some might be tempted to see in this tendency evidence of the much-mythologized left-wing bias of academia—a reactionary talking point that conveniently overlooks the many ways higher education does not challenge but rather helps to prop up existing inequalities. If it reflects any bias, it is perhaps the US-centrism of much research on protest music, past and present. Given the relatively close alignment of conservative and/or reactionary ideologies with concentrations of economic, political, and cultural power throughout the country’s history, it is only to be expected that most social movements contesting entrenched forms of social domination would be broadly progressive in orientation. And yet the partial and fragile achievements of causes like the labor, Civil Rights, and LGBTQ movements in the United States have shifted the balance of political forces just enough for a resurgent right-wing populism to seize on them in justifying its dubious claims: the belief that a liberal-progressive orthodoxy rules public discourse, that the true power elites are not economic or political but cultural, that adherents of so-called traditional values (read: White-supremacist patriarchy) face greater levels of discrimination than other groups, and so forth. In light of this recent transnational lurch to the right, failing to account for how music can contribute to not only progressive movements but also reactionary ones would not merely be an oversight; it would be irresponsible.

Thankfully, a growing number of scholars have trained their attention on precisely this often-overlooked aspect of music and protest, cases where music does harm precisely on account of which movements it helps.<sup>8</sup> Examples include Lentjes’s (2021) discussion of the changing sonic tactics of anti-abortion protesters, ethnomusicologist Jonathan Pieslak’s (2015) comparative study of the uses to which different extremist groups have put music, and Teitelbaum’s (2017) ethnographies of White nationalist musics in Sweden and other Nordic countries. Scholarship like this makes important contributions to our knowledge of protest musicking. Beyond this, it also raises critical questions of methodology. Reflecting on the kind of “collaboration, reciprocity, even advocacy” (Teitelbaum 2019, 414) that his ethnographic work on radical nationalism has entailed, Teitelbaum highlights a tension that has run through anthropology since at least the 1970s, between an ethical imperative for scholars to extend solidarity to their informants and a moral commitment for anthropological research to advance the social good. While this dual mandate remains unproblematic so long as anthropologists study marginalized or oppressed groups, it flares up once researchers start to “study up” rather than “study down,” investigating oppressors instead of the oppressed—or, just as importantly, when the intersectional character of identity means that no crisp delineation between oppressor and oppressed can be drawn in the first place. Teitelbaum’s way past this dilemma is to remain faithful to the ethical demand for scholar-informant solidarity, abandoning a moralistic stance and practicing what he calls “immoral anthropology” instead. Holding morally and politically dubious informants at arm’s length may keep one’s hands clean, Teitelbaum argues, but doing so forgoes the deeper insights that only solidarity can yield. He sums up the Faustian bargain thus: “The partnerships and interpersonal sympathies I formed with Nordic radical nationalists during fieldwork resulted in predictably unsettling outcomes, most notably scholarship and commentary that could have aided my informants’ cause.” And yet, he goes on to add, rejecting “the affectionate reciprocal relationships” he forged with informants “would have been to reject urgent insight into movements that many discuss but few understand” (415).

Although many will disagree with Teitelbaum’s decision to elevate scholar-informant solidarity over moral and political considerations, the kinds of questions he raises are urgent and need to be extended further, not least



of all to movements and associated musical practices that, on the surface, present fewer quandaries for researchers. To what extent is an interest in knowledge production—whether generated via ethnographic engagement or otherwise—aligned with the political interests of the movements and musicians we study? Is research on musical activism of benefit to the causes it documents? Should it be? Or is it possible for research on music and protest to remain “above the fray”? Or can it—as music itself sometimes does—actually harm the movements it documents? Can academic engagement with music and social movements serve as a substitute for other, more direct forms of political work we might engage in? Extending these reflections further, one might wonder how the study of historical forms of protest musicking might either help or hinder contemporary struggles (and their associated musics), either by providing useful models and antecedents or by setting a standard that more recent practices of protest musicking cannot satisfy. As regards the latter possibility, one should take care not to reproduce popular declinist narratives of protest music (as Manuel [2017] arguably does) by holding up a particular, historically contingent repertoire as the norm against which more recent repertoires are judged—and, more often than not, judged as lacking.

Whatever substantive responses are formulated to answer questions like these, reflecting on them is necessary if a productive dialogue on music and protest is to take shape across disciplines. To move beyond a serial accumulation of studies of particular protest musics will require grappling with questions about what the study of protest music more broadly entails—methodologically, epistemologically, politically, and otherwise. Among other things, such reflexivity is necessary to counterbalance the tendency in protest music research to define itself almost exclusively in terms of the particular music or movement under consideration, rather than in terms of the position the researcher occupies within a broader conversation or debate in which they participate. Fortunately, a handful of key interventions have already begun to move in this direction, as, for instance, in Manabe’s (2015) wide-ranging work on post-Fukushima music and protest or Tausig’s (2018) critique of the ethnocentrism of protest music discourse. And, at the risk of self-promotion, the *Oxford Handbook of Protest Music* that I am co-editing (Manabe and Drott, forthcoming) has been conceived with an eye toward fostering exchange across the splintered disciplinary spaces where protest music scholarship now resides. To date, however, initiatives like these remain the exception rather than the rule. Studies of protest music abound. What does not yet exist is a field of protest music studies, properly speaking. Assuming that such a thing is indeed desirable (a point some might contest), much work remains to be done. Given the mounting crises we are confronted with today—gaping inequalities, the spread of neofascism and revanchist ideologies, global ecological collapse, the turn to illiberal or managed democracy, the stubborn persistence of systemic racism (and especially anti-Black racism), the ongoing assaults on women’s rights and women’s bodily autonomy, legislative and extrajudicial attacks targeting trans folks, the weakening of workers’ rights across the world, and so forth—there is no time like the present to get started.

## NOTES

1. Also worth noting is that even if past usage has facilitated the transformation of “protest music” into a genre label, the stabilization that this represents is at best provisional. Genres, as I have argued elsewhere (Drott 2013), are never as static or fixed as they might seem, given that they are the distributed effect of countless performative acts, undertaken by any number of actors. An upshot of this is that genres are always subject to revision and negotiation—a process borne out, ironically, in the same kind of journalistic discourse that Tausig (2018) cites to exemplify protest music’s consolidation as a genre. In the years leading up to his 2018 article, the dominant question raised by journalists was, “Where have all the protest songs gone?” But in the wake of the massive uprising following the police killing of George Floyd in 2020, public discourse on protest music in the United States has notably shifted, with many commentators now contending that the past few years have witnessed a “protest music explosion” (Lipschutz 2020), such that we are currently living in a “new age of protest music” (McDaniel 2020). Notably, media discourses that extoll this recent surge of political popular song paint

a very different picture of the repertoire than the articles from just a few years beforehand, which bemoaned the waning relevance of protest song. Whereas the latter was still beholden to the model of politically engaged music provided by US and UK rock, folk, and soul of the 1960s and 1970s, the Black Lives Matter-inspired wave of protest music of the past half-decade is anchored in hip-hop and R&B. Whether this redefinition of “protest music” represents a temporary or more lasting transformation remains to be seen. But it does underline the plasticity not just of genre in general but of protest music in particular.

2. Representative is Rosenthal and Flacks (2011). While the framework their book provides is remarkably insightful, a major limitation is its almost exclusive focus on North American and British artists, apart from a few passing mentions of figures such as Victor Jara, Thomas Mapfumo, and Bob Marley.

3. Teitelbaum has recounted this sequence of events in a podcast interview (Taylor 2021).

4. Key sources in affect theory include Massumi (2002), Brennan (2004), Clough and Halley (2007), and Gregg and Seigworth (2010). On new materialism, see Alaimo and Hekman (2008), Bennett (2010), Coole and Frost (2010), and Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012).

5. For an incisive discussion of the new kinds of affective solidarity that music can help promote, as well as its utility for activism, see Abe (2016).

6. That said, there is a considerable amount of recent work that does retain a focus on more conventional forms of musical performance that occur in protest events. Examples include Abe’s (2016) work on Chindon-Ya and Manabe’s (2015) discussion of drumming and sound trucks in post-Fukushima protests in Japan; Garofalo’s, Allen’s, and Snyder’s writings on activist street bands in the United States, Brazil, and elsewhere (Garofalo, Allen, and Snyder 2020; Snyder 2020; Garofalo, forthcoming); and my own (forthcoming) reflections on how protesters improvise performances on “found” instruments (e.g., corrugated iron partitions) in street protests.

7. As Gürsel (2013) notes, the phrase “standing man” in Turkish (*duranadam*) has the same root as the verb “to stop” (*dur*), which is used by Turkish police in interpellating citizens. As a result, Gürsel remarks, “the standing man was merely following orders” (72).

8. In a review of scholarship on far-right music published in this journal, Teitelbaum (2021) notes that academic research on the topic “began in earnest during the 1990s.” Judging from the expansive literature that he cites, it would seem, however, that academic interest on the subject has increased significantly since 2010, most notably among music scholars such as himself. As he also notes, though, researchers with PhDs in music studies remain a distinct minority within the field, which remains dominated by “sociologists, political scientists, or historians...based in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany” (1).

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